TL 1088

CDPM
DOCUMENTAÇÃO
3/90

RECENT DEMONSTRATIONS IN DILI, EAST TIMOR

A tourist's observations

On January 17, 1990 a pro-independence demonstration by East Timorese students was staged at the Hotel Turismo in Dili in the presence of the visiting US Ambassador, John Monjo. After Monjo's departure, Indonesian security attacked the students seriously injuring several of them.

Despite this repression, the demonstrators took to the streets again on January 18 and 19.

The following account comes from Kerrie Ryan, an Australian tourist, who arrived in Dili on the afternoon of January 17 after the first demonstration but in time to obaerve the demonstrations that followed.

'I arrived in Dili about 1.00 pm on Wednesday 17 January. After a very long delay at the airport another visitor and myself began the 3-4 km journey from Comoro airport to the city. The trip began quietly enough but as we approached the city centre I sensed an increasing level of tension in our taxi. A number of military vehicles carrying personnel cradling automatic weapons overtook the taxi heading in the direction of my intended destination, the Hotel Turismo.

My co-passenger and the driver exchanged brief, rapid conversation, causing shadows of concern and apprehension on the until now friendly face beside me. My questions were met with a silencing finger to the mouth and a definite shaking of the head.

The driver decided to approach the Hotel Turismo by a back street but was turned away by a group of police. His third attempt, from the direction of White Sands beach, was also unsuccessful.

This time an officer came to the car and requested my co-passenger to explain why we were there. As she answered I saw through the rear window helmeted police with riot shields in position advancing slowly forward in a human barricade across the road.

I was informed in basic Indonesian that I would be taken to another hotel, the New Resende Inn. I was to wait there until the officer returned to see me safely to the Turismo.

However, after waiting nearly two hours I decided to make my own way to the Hotel Turismo along the deserted esplanade along the waterfront. I passed only soldiers but then came upon small groups of people huddled together outside what turned out to the Bishop's house.

They were talking quietly amongst themselves while other people pressed against a high mesh fence calling earnestly to people inside the grounds of the Bishop's house. Looking inside I saw countless young people with bandages on their heads and upper limbs. They were being attended to by nuns and lay people. Many of the bandages were blood-stained.

The following day, January 18, I came across a large crowd of people in a circle outside the Bishop's house. In the centre of this crowd

were seated young whom I believed had taken part in the previous day's demonstration. It appeared to be a conciliatory meeting involving the students, a policeman and some nuns and priests. Prayers were said and hymns sung before the crowd voluntarily dispersed.

On the afternoon of the following day, Friday January 19, while returning from a walk, I saw a large and vocal demonstration of some 150-200 people coming from the direction of the Governor's Office toward the shopping centre in Dili.

The participants appeared to be predominantly male and to be aged 16-19. There were also several young women of about the same age and some children about 12 years oland and some older males. The leaders and a few demonstrators had concealed their faces with pieces of cloth presumably to avoid recognition.

Standing with a group of silent onlookers I took a number of photos of the approaching demonstrators. Those in the front line held banners some of which were written in either Portuguese, Tetum or English.

Those in English read: 'Timor for East Timorese', 'Rights and Justice'. As the crowd approached a young masked man stood confrontingly inches in front of me angrily talking in either Portuguese or Tetum. Raising his arms skyward he shook them violently. I was not sure whether he was threatening me or not and was quite shaken. However on looking at the bystanders I received reassuring nods and smiles.

As far as I could see there were only 3 police vehicles in attendance which I found perplexing knowing that demonstrations were illegal. Realising that I had been watched by people in a government vehicle on the opposite side of the street, I decided to return to the hotel as quickly as possible. I feared that if the film was confiscated many of those in the photographs could be subjected to reprisals and that I was putting them at risk by my actions. The film, however, remained in my possession.

K. A. Ryan

17 February 1990